



**Public Testimony: State Board of Education  
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Good afternoon. I am Ada Beth Cutler and I am the dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Montclair State University, where tomorrow, we will graduate and recommend for certification 769 outstanding new teachers for NJ's public schools. It has been my pleasure this year to work with talented and dedicated members of the NJ Department of Education and colleagues from the public schools and higher education, on efforts to improve teacher quality and teacher education in the state. For the past nine months, I have served as chair of the Higher Education Task Force, charged by Commissioner Davy with developing recommendations for a new and improved process of program approval for education programs in the state, and as chair of a statewide committee to make recommendations to improve elementary teacher preparation. The productive and innovative work of these two groups informs my remarks today.

I want to use my brief time today to address proposed code changes in Subchapter 10-Standards for New Jersey Educator Preparation Programs in Higher Education. All of my remarks are grounded in my strong support for New Jersey's decision a number of years ago to move to standards-based teacher education, which means we are guided by what the state says teacher candidates must know and be able to do rather than by a set of inputs that is not necessarily connected to outcomes.

First, I want to applaud the decision to remove the 30-credit limit on coursework devoted to professional preparation at the undergraduate level. There is no precedent anywhere in the code for such a credit limit and it unnecessarily constrains programs that lead to dual certification or those that allow multiple majors as paths to elementary certification. With the New Jersey requirement that all teacher candidates have a liberal arts and sciences major, it is not possible for any college or university to require teacher candidates to take much more than 30 credits in professional coursework. Rather, removing that credit limit allows some needed flexibility in our programs.

My major concerns about the proposed changes in section 10.2 center on the specific course requirements for elementary teacher candidates. I concur with the Department of Education that we must assure, to the best of our ability, that elementary teachers in New Jersey are well prepared to teach all students to meet the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and attain high levels of achievement. But, in a standards based system, it is false security to think that prescribing specific courses will enable us to assure that. To every complex problem there is a simple but wrong solution. In the case

of the complex issue of teacher education, prescribing inputs is an example of a simple but wrong solution.

Just because a college or university, or an alternate route center includes a specific course or specified hours covering prescribed topics does not assure, in any way, what students in those classes are learning or what they are able to do as teachers. Take the example of the two literacy courses that are prescribed in these proposed code changes. One of these courses is a highly theoretical one on the phonology and structure of American English. At Montclair State, we include this theoretical content in one of our required literacy courses, but it is integrated with pedagogy and field experiences. There is a long record of research that shows that the separation of theory and practice in teacher preparation has not served teachers or our P-12 students well. There is absolutely no evidence anywhere that prescribing and requiring this separate, theoretical course will lead to better reading instruction in our elementary classrooms. Furthermore, prescribing such specific coursework is an abridgement of academic freedom and a denigration of academic expertise in building effective teacher education programs that respond to current research. Other specified courses in the proposed changes could constrain creativity in the delivery of learning experiences and course construction. For instance, in Montclair State's program, we advocate and teach the development of interdisciplinary curriculum at the elementary level. Requiring a separate mathematics pedagogy course rather than a sequence, such as ours, that integrates mathematics, science and technology pedagogy would destroy that innovative approach in our program.

Please know that I am not advocating that the state abdicate its responsibility to monitor and assure high quality teacher preparation for elementary candidates or for any other endorsement for that matter. What I am recommending is a different and potentially more efficacious path to that goal. The Higher Education Task Force will soon recommend that the state adopt, in the new 2009 Administrative Code, subject specific standards that define what teachers must know and be able to do to teach well and enable students to meet the Core Curriculum Content Standards. We will also recommend that the state develop or adopt performance assessments for teachers, aligned with state standards, to be administered at the end of traditional teacher education programs and at the end of the provisional certification period for all teachers. These assessments will tell us what teacher candidates and teachers actually know and are able to do in the classroom, and the results of these assessments will provide much needed evidence of the quality of all teacher education programs, including the alternate route, in the state. This is not a quick fix in the way that prescribing specific courses is, but it has a much greater chance of achieving the outcomes we all want and the children of New Jersey deserve.

As the dean of one of the largest teacher education programs in the state, I welcome and invite the State to hold us accountable for the performance of our graduates in New Jersey's classrooms. Prescribing specific coursework in our programs will not achieve that accountability. Let us work together to construct a more authentic, meaningful, and rigorous method for achieving our common and important goal of better teachers for New Jersey's schools.